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NSC STAFF FOR WATERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/29/2017

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SUBJECT: STRANDED PALESTINIANS BEGIN TO DEPART RAFAH FOR GAZA, VIA ISRAEL

Classified by A/DCM William R. Stewart for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

**¶11.** (C) Egyptian military intelligence told Assistant Army Attache who was visiting North Sinai on July 29 that 101 Palestinians, among the estimated 6000 who have been stranded in Egypt since the June 9 closure of the Rafah border crossing with Gaza, have begun to make their homeward journey. Due to the closure of Rafah, and Hamas threats to disrupt or attack any effort to move the travlers through the nearby Israeli-Egyptian crossing at Kerem Shalom (Karim Abu Salem), the GOE worked with the GOI and the PA to achieve a high-level political agreement o/a July 23 to facilitate the return of the Palestinians via Netzana (AKA Auja, from Egyptian Sinai into Israel), approximately 50 kms south of Rafah. The agreement called for the returning Palestinians to transit Israel as they headed back into Gaza, via Eretz, a border crossing in north Gaza that is still under Fatah control.

**¶12.** (C) Egyptian military contacts further told our Attache that they plan to assist 1000-1500 Palestinians to return to Gaza on Monday, July 30. The GOE has been increasingly keen in recent days to facilitate the return of the stranded Palestinians to Gaza, particularly in the face of increased media attention to the plight of the Palestinians.

**¶13.** (U) Wire service reports, quoting the Palestinian embassy in Cairo, indicated that the GOE used the Al-Arish stadium as a staging ground for the commencement of the repatriation process. According to the wire service reports, a spokesman for the Palestinian embassy indicated that "a second batch (around 500 people)" will be transported tomorrow. The spokesman said "Priority is given to those who previously registered their names at the Palestinian embassy in Cairo."

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